



EFL Students' Reliance on ChatGPT as Writing Support: A Study on Thesis Writing at Hamzanwadi University

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Abstract: The research investigates the use of ChatGPT by EFL learners for their thesis writing in Hamzanwadi University. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was utilized whereby quantitative data were collected through questionnaires from 55 participants who are in the eighth semester while qualitative data were obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with five purposive respondents. The study results showed a high level of functional reliance on ChatGPT with respect to the ability to understand certain complex theories, improve the grammar, and write paragraphs among students. Yet, psychological and cognitive dependence of students were at moderate levels. Hence, students are able to retain their critical thinking abilities and independence in academic pursuits and consider AI as their cooperating language helper rather than cognitive worker's replacement. Such a phenomenon that may be called "Controlled Reliance" proves that expansion of AI technologies application is not a reason for the lack of independent thinking. Therefore, the higher education institutions are encouraged to devise AI literacy courses aimed at enhancing the usage of artificial intelligence rather than prohibitive measures.

Keywords: Chatgpt; Controlled Reliance; EFL Thesis Writing.

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Introduction

The application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in schooling has drastically altered teaching techniques, especially for achieving proficiency in EFL writing. Writing itself is a complicated process as it requires one to pay attention to grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and various structures of scholarly arguments at the same time. This is why students learning EFL experience difficulty and psychological discomfort when writing because they do not know how to express their theoretical thoughts in different paragraphs. In this perspective, different AI-driven tools, such as ChatGPT, appear to be great innovations in pedagogical practices that comprise customized teaching, real-time feedback, and immediate writing assistance. Thanks to assisting students with brainstorming, writing and editing activities, the software promotes easier completion of

writing tasks. Although AI provides many benefits, the increase in its use creates serious questions about the degree of student involvement with the studying process and independence in their academic work. Though artificial intelligence presents various advantages in terms of such aspect of writing as grammar and style, its development has not resulted in the emergence of an AI capable of genuine critical thinking or interpretation necessary for high-level academic writing.

There are various studies focused in the exploration of the benefits of ChatGPT in improving coherence of writing and lowering anxiety of EFL students. Nevertheless, there is a noticeable gap in research about AI usage for high-stakes academic tasks such as thesis writing. Compared to regular writing, thesis writing does not only require linguistic

correctness but also implies the use of critical thinking and a unique author's voice which an overusing of AI might threaten.

The urgent need to handle this issue cannot be overemphasized. Blind faith in a tool like ChatGPT leads to potentially dangerous side effects on students' intellectual development over the long term. The use of AI products goes from being a supporting mechanism to replacing the thought process. This means that students' critical thinking becomes non-functional, and the real meaning of their education disappears. The role of realizing the limits of the necessary usage of the tool that can help is the first thing for English major students who study in a foreign language environment and need to conduct academic research.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the extent of EFL students' reliance on ChatGPT as a writing support tool during the thesis writing process among English Education students at Hamzanwadi University. For purposes of this study, the researcher is expected to determine frequency and depth of application of this technology in various stages of thesis development from emergence of ideas to final revision. Additionally, the study aims to analyze students' attitudes to ChatGPT with regard to advantages, trappings, and ethical implications of the employment of artificial intelligence in thesis writing. Although being limited to a specific group of respondents at one university this study serves more as a case study than a universal achievement since it grants insight into the effects of AI technology on academic writing process in details.

The results indicated by this study are anticipated to bring notable contributions both theoretically and practically in the discussions on AI applied to teaching languages. Theoretically, it adds to the existing research on EFL academic writing since this study is capable of providing empirical evidence concerning the nuances of using AI in the process of writing undergraduate theses specifically. In practical terms, this study presents the educators, thesis supervisors, and policymakers with useful information for developing appropriate approaches and guidelines for the use of AI in higher education. Thus, in general, this research contributes to the establishment of more responsible and sustainable academic practices of using AI in education for the purposes of aiding critical thinking rather than substituting it.

Method

The utilization of a mixed-methods research approach was employed and most importantly a Sequential Explanatory Design as well was used to look into this phenomenon from both quantitative and qualitative means. The context in which this research was conducted is the English Education Study Program

of the Faculty of Language, Art, and Humanities at Hamzanwadi University, located in East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The setting was selected purposely because the student is effectively practicing academic writing, providing an appropriate opportunity for the researcher to observe the integration of AI tools.

The group of participants consisted of eighth-semester students learning English as a foreign language (EFL), that is people who were openly engaged in writing their undergraduate thesis or had submitted their thesis. To ensure the reliability and validity of the results reviewed, purposive sampling was applied while selecting 55 individuals. Everyone selected was considered on the condition that they had experience in utilizing ChatGPT technology in writing their thesis which allowed the researchers to attain maximum descriptive and useful answers concerning the difficulties and issues of AI usage in writing.

The process of collecting data occurred in two separate phases following one another and utilized three major instruments, namely questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and field notes. In the first, quantitative phase a questionnaire was distributed among 55 students using a 5-point Likert scale (the scale includes five selections: 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Neither Agree Nor Disagree', 'Disagree', and 'Strongly Disagree') online via Google Forms and on paper to assess the extent to which students have relied on ChatGPT. Measurement was based on the relevant dimensions of writing support with regard to how often students have relied on AI technology for checking grammar and vocabulary, as well as for generating and structuring ideas, paraphrasing sentences and revising a piece of writing. Prior to collecting data, the questionnaire has been reviewed by an expert in order to secure the content validity of the instrument followed by a pilot study aimed at checking reliability of the questionnaire utilizing the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

Following this, the study progressed into its qualitative phase, during which five participants with the highest levels of reliance were purposely chosen so that in-depth interviews could be conducted. Each participant participated in a semi-structured interview lasting between 10 and 15 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded for later evaluation of the main reasons, perceived positive aspects, and challenges associated with the use of AI technology by the selected participants. With this in mind, the researcher also took observation notes during the interviews to note non-verbal cues, the nature of the situation, and the level of confidence of the participants during the interview process.

The analysis of the data was in accordance with the sequential explanatory method. First, the

quantitative data were analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics with the mean scores and percentages calculated to categorize students' AI dependency levels. Subsequently, qualitative data from transcribed interviews and field notes were analyzed using the thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

For the qualitative data to be organized properly, a manual coding technique had to be applied. The researchers looked for the most frequently mentioned words, phrases, and ideas, and grouped them into the main themes and sub-themes. During the coding, observational field notes were thoroughly checked so that the hidden meaning could be accurately interpreted. The entire system of coding that was applied to identify the patterns in students' AI dependence, advantages, and ethical issues is presented in the coding scheme below (see Table 1).

Table 1. Coding Scheme for Interview Data

Themes	Sub-Themes	Topics	Codes
A. Students' Reliance on ChatGPT in Thesis Writing	1. Reasons for Relying on ChatGPT	a. Using ChatGPT for grammar checking	A-1-a
		b. Using ChatGPT for generating ideas	A-1-b
		c. Using ChatGPT for paraphrasing sentences	A-1-c
	2. Factors Influencing Reliance on ChatGPT	a. Lack of confidence in writing	A-2-a
		b. Difficulty in academic writing	A-2-b
		c. Limited vocabulary and grammar mastery	A-2-c
	3. Effects of Reliance on ChatGPT	a. Improving writing efficiency	A-3-a
		b. Reducing critical thinking	A-3-b
		c. Creating dependence on AI tools	A-3-c

B. Students' Experiences in Using ChatGPT	1. Patterns of ChatGPT Usage	a. Frequency of using ChatGPT	B-1-a
		b. Using ChatGPT during thesis revision	B-1-b
	2. Students' Perceptions toward ChatGPT Reliance	a. Positive views on AI assistance	B-2-a
		b. Ethical concerns in using ChatGPT	B-2-b

In this part of the study, results were analyzed from coded interpretations and qualitative research yields were placed into context of the quantitative data. Lastly, in order to ensure trustworthiness and reliability of the results, methodological triangulation was used in collection of data via all three instruments and the study made use of dense descriptions for ensuring transferability and abided to formal methodological rigor requirements.

Result and Discussion

The results obtained from the quantitative phase and the qualitative phase of the study are presented in this section of the paper. The purpose of the research was to find out how much the students depended on ChatGPT and what perceptions they have regarding its use. Quantitative data collected from the 55 students at the eighth-semester English Education major section provides information about their behavior. At the same time, qualitative data collected from five interviewees provides more substantial information about their actual situation.

In order to determine the degree of dependence among students, a questionnaire was used in the research.

Table 2. Students' Reliance on ChatGPT in Thesis Planning

No	Statement (Section A)	Mean Score	Category
1	I use ChatGPT to help determine my thesis research topic.	3.60	High Reliance
2	I use ChatGPT to help identify research problems in my thesis.	3.65	High Reliance
3	I use ChatGPT to help formulate research	3.55	High Reliance

	questions.		
4	I use ChatGPT to help formulate research objectives.	3.38	Moderate Reliance
5	I use ChatGPT to help develop the background of my study.	3.65	High Reliance
Overall Mean Score for Section A		3.57	High Reliance

As is shown in Table 2, respondents demonstrated a High Reliance ($M = 3.57$) on ChatGPT in the thesis initial planning phase. Students mainly use the AI to formulate research problems and form the background of the study, both showing the highest scores of 3.65. On the other hand, creating research goals was rated the lowest ($M = 3.38$). It means that students widely apply AI for brainstorming purposes in defining the overall research framework and finding a gap, while applying more independent thinking in specifying measurable research objectives.

Table 3. *Students' Reliance on ChatGPT in Literature Review*

No	Statement (Section B)	Mean Score	Category
1	I use ChatGPT to help find or understand theories related to my research topic.	3.82	High Reliance
2	I use ChatGPT to help understand articles or journals relevant to my research.	3.78	High Reliance
3	I use ChatGPT to help summarize articles or journals used in my literature review.	3.71	High Reliance
Overall Mean Score for Section B		3.77	High Reliance

Table 3 reflects the strongest functional dependence present in all domains analyzed ($M = 3.77$). The sixth item regarding the comprehension of theoretical ideas was the highest-rated in the survey ($M = 3.82$). It means that there is a certain academic issue to address: students have huge problems with understanding intricate academic terminology.

Thus, ChatGPT, in essence, is used as the cognitive link to make theories easier and summarize extensive literature ($M = 3.71$) to make it possible for students to grasp the material and later put it into the academic framework.

Table 4. *Students' Reliance on ChatGPT in Thesis Writing*

Support

No	Statement (Section C)	Mean Score	Category
1	I use ChatGPT to help understand the research methodology used in my thesis.	3.60	High Reliance
2	I use ChatGPT when I have difficulty finding arguments to support my research topic.	3.82	High Reliance
3	I use ChatGPT to help improve coherence between sentences and paragraphs in my writing.	3.82	High Reliance
4	I use ChatGPT to help write or revise the methodology section of my thesis.	3.65	High Reliance
5	I use ChatGPT to help develop research instruments.	3.67	High Reliance
6	I use ChatGPT to help improve grammar and sentence structure in my thesis writing.	3.60	High Reliance
7	I use ChatGPT to help paraphrase information obtained from scholarly sources.	3.49	High Reliance
8	I use ChatGPT to help revise parts of my thesis based on feedback from my supervisor.	3.73	High Reliance
Overall Mean Score for Section C		3.67	High Reliance

According to the data in Table 4, the use of technical writing assistance is quite high ($M=3.67$). ChatGPT is utilized by students the most for all things regarding the search for support material (item 10) and enhancement of the coherence of paragraphs (item 11), which have both scored 3.82. Therefore, it can be concluded that the mechanical element of academic writing such as logical flow and structural cohesion constitutes a major problem facing EFL learners. Hence, it can be stated that ChatGPT is used mainly as an online editorial tool that could correct the structural problems and connect logical statements throughout the drafting process.

Table 5 illustrates an important difference with the elevated functional use, revealing that psychological dependence remains strictly at the "Moderate" level ($M = 3.13$). Although students acknowledge that they normally turn first to ChatGPT for help in their studies (Item 17, $M = 3.62$), no academic paralysis occurs in its

absence. The claim that they cannot write without this tool received the lowest score ($M = 2.78$), whereas the worry of its lack taken over by students ranks moderately high ($M = 2.89$). Thus, it can be stated that despite the great technical usage, students can still think independently and do not feel powerless without the AI assistance.

Table 5. *Students' Psychological and Cognitive Reliance on ChatGPT*

No	Statement (Section D)	Mean Score	Category
17	When I face difficulties in writing my thesis, ChatGPT is the first tool I use before seeking help from other sources.	3.62	High Reliance
18	I feel less confident in writing my thesis without assistance from ChatGPT.	3.24	Moderate Reliance
19	I usually rely on ChatGPT before discussing writing problems with my supervisor or classmates.	3.33	Moderate Reliance
20	I cannot continue writing my thesis without ChatGPT.	2.78	Moderate Reliance
21	I feel anxious if ChatGPT is unavailable.	2.89	Moderate Reliance
22	I rely on ChatGPT more than my own writing ability.	3.00	Moderate Reliance
23	I feel more confident using suggestions from ChatGPT than developing ideas on my own.	3.04	Moderate Reliance
Overall Mean Score for Section D		3.13	Moderate Reliance

The qualitative data acquired from five semi-structured interviews further elaborates on the numerical findings. Indeed, the interviews suggest that the participants rely on ChatGPT mainly for translating and enhancing existing human ideas (Code A-1-b, A-1-a) instead of making up a thesis statement on their own. One of the respondents, for instance, mentioned that the AI could only be used to "work on the ideas that I have" before expressing them in writing. The need to resort to such use of the AI is dictated by serious academic difficulties, including the struggles with grammar and the inability to work with literature independently (Code A-2-b, A-2-c). The difficulties mentioned find

further support in the field notes capturing the non-verbal behavior of the subjects indicating their hesitance to talk about their grammatical issues.

In terms of how AI has affected participants' academic skills, the interviewees rejected any allegation that it undermines critical thinking (Code A-3-b). They consider it, however, as a practical tool that assists in "typing" and generally makes the processes more effective (Code A-3-a). Moreover, they demonstrated clear ethical considerations (Code B-2-a, B-2-b) repeatedly emphasizing the need for "wise usage". They also expressed their conviction that "copy-paste" practices result only in mediocre performance and do harm to writing skills. The interviewees' self-assured behavior during interviews proved that they considered themselves the main intellectual agents in the interaction with technologies rather than passive consumers of its results.

To summarize, the study demonstrated that there is a clear difference in how EFL students interact with ChatGPT. When it comes to functionality, students rely significantly on the AI to help them understand sophisticated theory, improve their grammar, and solve problems related to writing structure. By contrast, psychologically and cognitively, students' dependence is much lower than functionally. They have high academic independence, use the AI merely to polish their original thoughts, and understand the ethical limitations of using ChatGPT to avoid instances of plagiarism.

The occurrence seen among EFL (English as foreign language) students raises serious objections to the general consensus about the role of AI in higher education. Though the extensive practical exploitation of ChatGPT for the purposes of writing in a way of successfully tackling problems connected with the disuse of language is promoting the findings of Harunasari (2023), according to which AI represents a very effective device for getting rid of language issues, there has been no sign of deterioration of cognitive processes in the current case. Previous studies, particularly those by Selwyn (2022) and Tahir et al. (2025), have repeatedly indicated that such a highly technological usage of AI entails losing independent or critical thinking and involvement in the process of cognition in general. Nonetheless, the results of the current study demonstrate the opposite results. Since the inventors of the research remain in control of the ideas and arguments they put forward in the course of their research, they use AI as an advanced, sophisticated translator rather than as a means of external assistance for thinking.

Moreover, this paper builds on the findings of Haziz et al. (2025) about self-editing and self-reflection. Rather than considering the technology as a magical

ghostwriter to escape academic burdens, students use ChatGPT as a collaborating assistant. The activity of uploading drafts to get feedback from AI requires an altogether different kind of cognitive effort, as opposed to a mere act of "copy-pasting." This illustrates a developed level of AI literacy in students whose ethical boundaries are intact. Students understand that cheating does not only breach academic integrity but also delivers poor quality output that actually creates problems for their scholarly voice in the future and, therefore, act mindfully and ethically in relation to AI in this context.

The advent of the "Controlled Reliance" model is fundamentally widespread in terms of theoretical and practical implications. From the perspective of theory, it brings a finely tuned distinction to the field of EFL writing by disassociating the use of functional resources and psychological dependence. From the practical point of view, the findings render many pedagogical practices obsolete. Instead of trying to prohibit students from using AI tools, universities ought to start incorporating AI literacy into the curriculum. Educators have new responsibilities. They should teach students to distinguish when it is acceptable to benefit from AI technology as a legitimate brainstorming support and when it is wrong.

In spite of all these valuable findings, the limitations of the current research are related to answers being collected through self-reports. The use of questionnaires and interview methods allows measuring subjective judgment and self-assessment of dependency but cannot provide objective measures for the quality of end products. Future research should focus on experimental designs or direct document analysis since the contrast between academic rigor of thesis drafts created with and without ChatGPT in the future research will help determine the real value of the tool in terms of the quality of academic writing.

Conclusion

The research delineates the occurrence of Controlled Reliance, indicating that EFL learners display an extensive dependence on the capabilities of ChatGPT in the course of their thesis writing. While the students exhibit a remarkable reliance on the technological powers of the artificial intelligence in carrying out scientific tasks, it is important to underline that such excessive involvement does not lead to mental dependence. The respondents firmly keep control over their thinking processes by treating the device as a tool of language assistance instead of a cognitive support system.

These results have crucial theoretical implications as Controlled Reliance contradicts the existing belief about the automatic decrease of critical

thinking skills among individuals due to the high degree of AI presence in their lives. Moreover, practically speaking, the findings show that prohibitive teaching policies already belong to the past. Higher educational institutions must adjust their working methodologies and implement AI literacy programs in order to provide rational guidance in dealing with ethical problems arising from the use of artificial intelligence.

What makes this research unique is the way it applies its empirical analysis of functional tool usage and psychological dependence. It offers a mixed-method approach that makes an important contribution to the development of frameworks for safe use of AI. These frameworks will preserve academic integrity without preventing the emergence of new technologies as such.

Future research should also extend its scope of inquiry from synchronous perception-based studies to those based on experimental design or analysis of real documents to determine whether ChatGPT adds a true value to academic dissertations, or whether it only makes their drafting process more rapid.

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